The Narrative Pyramid Analysis Tool
A Tool and Worksheet for Communicators
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Narrative Strategy for Racial Justice:

Over time, narrative strategies for racial justice create the conditions for narrative justice and power for people of color — so that experiences, analysis, and solutions stemming from communities of color are amplified and become the norm. It involves thoughtful visioning, design and planning, in order to align alternative deep narratives and narratives, along with race-explicit stories and messages.

Too often, we focus exclusively on tailoring messages and developing stories — without adequate attention to work on deeper, more entrenched narratives and deep narratives. Our Narrative Pyramid Tool (included below) shows how deep narratives produce narratives, which in turn are manifested and transmitted through stories, and carried farther through messages. Narrative strategy intervenes at the all four levels of the Pyramid — not just at the level of story-shift or messaging. ***A robust narrative strategy links all four parts of the Narrative Strategy Pyramid from deep narratives down through messages.***

On the next page, you can see how the four elements of the Narrative Pyramid line up with Center for Community Change and ASO Message Lessons and Recommendations.
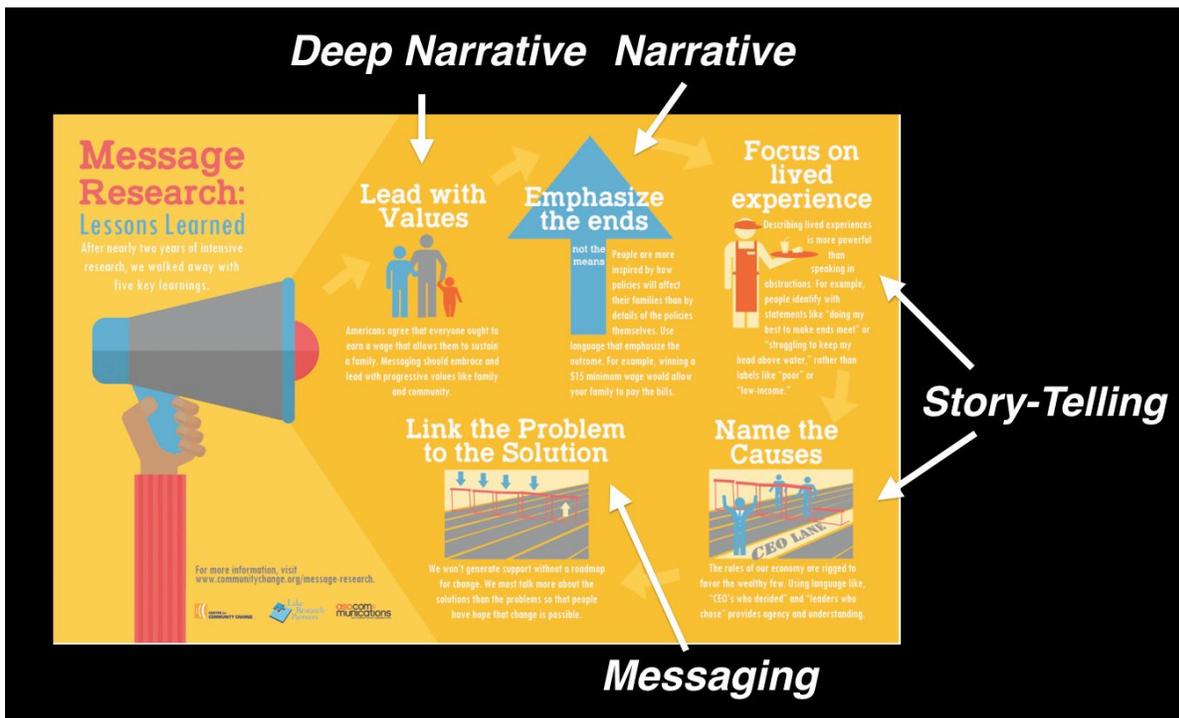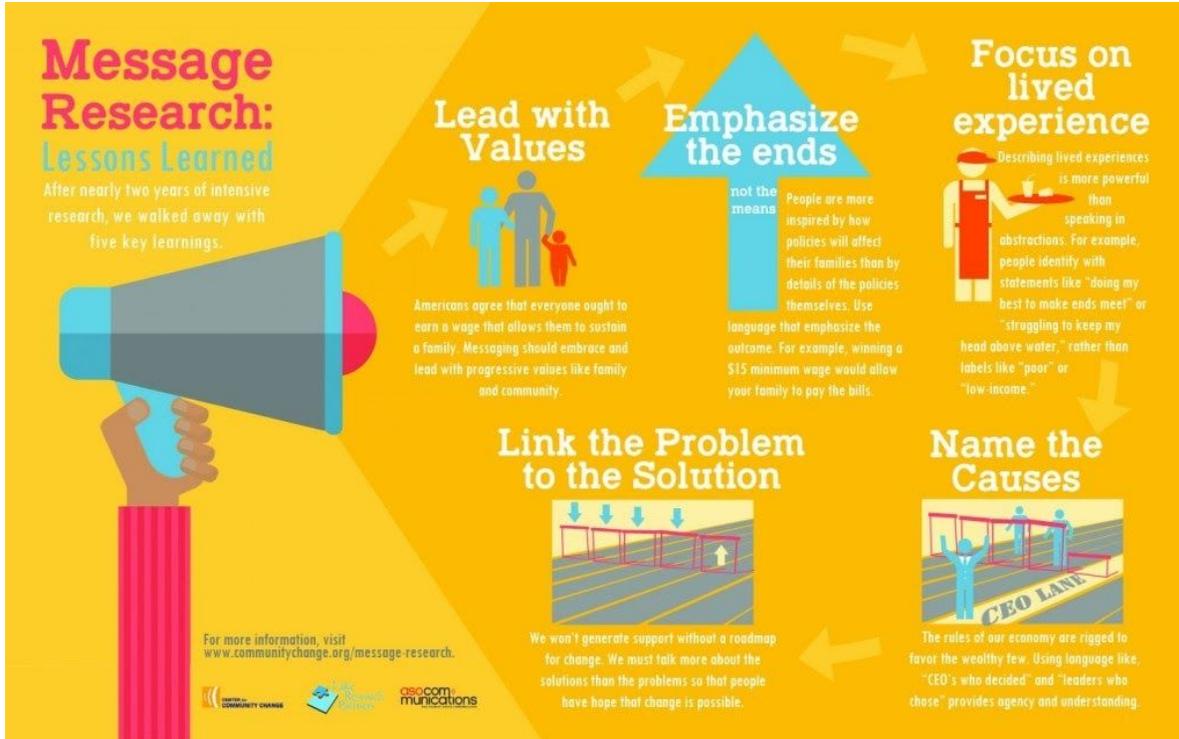
Characteristics of Narrative Strategies for Racial Justice:

☐ An explicit **naming** of race and racial dynamics

☐ Careful crafting and selection of **stories** that uphold the desired narratives rather than unintentionally reinforcing dominant narratives

☐ Alignment across the whole **narrative pyramid** from:
 messages → stories → narratives → deep narratives

☐ Attention to **reception** of messages and stories by stakeholders, as well as other segmented or target audiences

☐ **Development, iteration, and recalibration** of stories in collaboration with impacted stakeholders of color. Narratives should never be imposed on communities without their buy-in, input, and engagement first.

Instructions for Using This Narrative Pyramid Worksheet and Tool:

The following worksheet is designed to help you — along with your team and collaborators — identify gaps and opportunities for narrative strategy and alignment in your work.

Step 1: Individual Reflection
To dive into this worksheet, we recommend that you individually sit with all the questions first, so you can explore the narrative Pyramid tool with time and attention. As you answer the questions, be honest with yourself about which narratives your work is transmitting, whether intentionally or not.

Step 2: Answer Questions 1-7 to move from top to bottom of the Narrative Pyramid (from deep narrative through messaging). As you work your way through the questions, refer back to the Narrative Pyramid image to reflect on the relationship between your messages, stories and narratives.

Step 3: Team Reflection and Next Steps
Once you've individually reflected on Questions 1-7, set up a meeting with your team that's responsible for communications and review all your answers on this tool together. Compare your selected deep narratives, narratives, stories and messages. Notice any overlaps or deviations. Then answer Questions 8-9 together as a team.

Narrative Strategy Pyramid Tool and Worksheet:
Assessing and Aligning Your Narrative Strategy

Q1. Your Issue Area: _____

Identifying Dominant/Stock Narratives in Your Issue Area:

Q2: In your issue area, what are the THREE most pervasive and problematic dominant or stock narratives that you keep running into? These should be specific dominant narratives that your base, constituents and stakeholders are contesting in their lives and work.
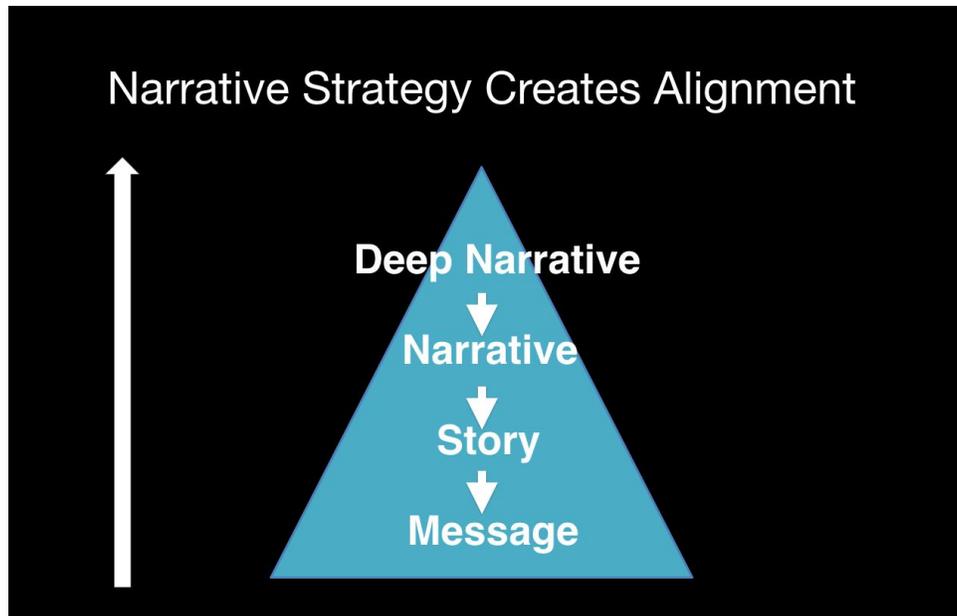
Dominant/Stock Narrative 1:

_____

Dominant/Stock Narrative 2:

_____

Dominant/Stock Narrative 3:

_____

A robust narrative strategy links all four parts of the Narrative Strategy Pyramid — from deep narratives down through messages.

Identifying Deep Narratives:

Q3: Deep Narratives involve deeply ingrained values, worldviews, ideologies and belief systems that mold and shape our perception and reality, and enable us to experience information as real, meaningful, and true. For your issue area, first begin by identifying the deep narrative elements.

Q3a) Which specific values do you want to advance in your issue area? (eg resilience, solidarity, self-determination, etc)

_____
_____

Q3b) What worldview, belief or ideology do you want to advance in your issue area?

_____
_____

Q3c) How do the values, worldviews, ideologies and beliefs listed above connect to the lived experiences of people of color impacted by your issue area?

_____
_____

Identifying Desired Narratives:

Q4: In your issue area, what are TWO desired narratives that you are collectively advancing?

Desired Narrative 1:

_____

Desired Narrative 2:

_____

Q5. Check your Narrative Alignment on the Pyramid Tool:
Do your two alternative/desired narratives align with the values, beliefs and worldviews promoted in your ideal deep narratives? Does any part of your narrative contradict your deep narrative? (If there is dissonance or misalignment, go back to Q3 and Q4 and iterate until you land on narratives that align with your deep narratives.)

_____

_____

Analyzing and Aligning Your Stories:

Q6a). In your work right now, what are TWO specific stories that your team is repeating? Who are the protagonists and villains? What root causes and solutions do the stories propose?

Story # 1_____
_____
_____

Story # 2_____
_____
_____

Q6b) For each of these stories, move *down the Pyramid* to link deep narratives and narratives through to your stories.

How are the stories you selected above aligned with your desired/alternative narrative?
How might they be inadvertently reproducing the dominant narrative?
How are the stories reproducing or contradicting your identified deep narratives?

_____
_____
_____

Analyzing and Aligning Your Messages:

Q7a) In your work right now, what are TWO specific messages that your team repeats on a regular basis? These can be messages you use externally (on your website and marketing materials) as well as what you repeat internally on your team.

Message 1: _____
Message 2: _____

Q7b) For each of these two messages above, move *down the Pyramid* to link deep narratives and narratives to your stories, and then to your messages.

How are the messages you selected above aligned with your desired/alternative narrative? How might they be inadvertently reproducing the dominant narrative?
How are the messages reproducing or contradicting your identified deep narratives?
Is there alignment and resonance between your narrative, story and message?

_____
_____
_____

Team Reflection and Next Steps:

Q8. Who are the impacted stakeholders you should collaborate with around this strategy for developing deep narratives and narratives and crafting and selecting messages and stories? (List specific names of people or organizations if applicable).

_____

_____

_____

Q9. What changes do you need to make in your communications or messaging at this time in order to engage a cohesive, aligned narrative strategy that lines up with all four parts of the Narrative Pyramid? Identify some next steps for your team here.

_____

_____

_____

Thank you! For questions, please email the Race Forward Narrative and Cultural Strategies team at narrative@raceforward.org.